

THE DIRECTOR OF CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE

WASHINGTON, D. C. 20505

26 February 1979

National Intelligence Officers

MEMORANDUM FOR: National Intelligence Officer for Warning
25X1 FROM:
National Intelligence Officer for China
SUBJECT: Update of Monthly Warning Assessment:
China

1. The eventuality foreseen in our memorandum of 25 January has, in fact, occurred -- China attacked Vietnam on 17 February with elements of eight armies and now is engaged in heavy fighting virtually along the entire length of the China-Vietnamese border. Chinese forces have taken the important towns of Lao Cai, Cao Bang, and Dong Dang, and are threatening Lang Son and Mong Cai. They may be as deep as 40 kilometers inside Vietnam in the Lao Cai area, although penetrations elsewhere average from 5 to 15 kilometers.

2. Statements by senior Chinese leaders indicate that the Chinese still wish to limit the fighting both in scope and time. They seek to administer a heavy blow to the Vietnamese (which may be shaping up in the Lang Son area as Vietnam reinforces this area) but have said they do not intend to advance to the Red River Delta nor threaten Hanoi. They also have stated that they intend to withdraw from Vietnam as soon as their military purpose is accomplished.

3. In speaking of limiting the conflict, the Chinese undoubtedly have their eye on world opinion, and more importantly, on the Soviet Union. The Soviets are now under some compulsion to respond to the Chinese invasion of Vietnam with an action or actions designed to demonstrate support of Vietnam under the terms of the Soviet-Vietnamese Peace and Friendship Treaty.

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They are undertaking intensive surveillance of the Sino-Soviet border, particularly in NE China, have engaged in military maneuvers in a number of areas along the border, have dispatched 6 air cargo flights to Hanoi, and have sent naval units into the South China Sea waters near Vietnam. However, Soviet statements appear to indicate that the Soviets will not move directly unless they conclude Vietnam cannot handle the Chinese alone--a judgment they have not reached--and they would evidently prefer to limit their help to logistical support and political backing. But the Chinese are concerned about what the Soviets may yet do, and are evacuating civilians all along the Sino-Soviet border.

4. Meanwhile, debate in the UN is focusing upon both the Kampuchean and Vietnamese situations, with a consensus apparently building toward a call for the removal of all foreign forces. Inability of the USSR and Vietnam to limit attention to the Chinese invasion alone may further inhibit Soviet direct action.

5. Nevertheless, the possibility of a larger conflict arising out of Indochinese developments in general still exists, as China and the USSR react to one another's military and political moves and Vietnamese resistance (and occupation of Kampuchea) continues. The Chinese are not likely to withdraw from Vietnam until they have succeeded in inflicting a significant military defeat on that country.

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